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ABSTRACT

The nature of the listening and speaking instruments used for the Massachusetts assessment of those skills is discussed in this paper. Information concerning the design and administration of the assessment and data analysis is included. Copies of the instruments are appended. (FL)

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THE MASSACHUSETTS BASIC SKILLS ASSESSMENT OF LISTENING AND SPEAKING

No. 08-SL-55

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OVERVIEW

Background

The Massachusetts Basic Skills Assessment of listening and speaking was conducted during the 1979-80 school year in response to the Massachusetts Basic Skills Improvement Policy. The purpose of the policy is to improve student competencies in the basic skills of mathematics, reading, writing, listening and speaking.

As a part of the Basic Skills Improvement Policy, the State Department of Education is required to assess the current level of performance of public school 12th graders in the basic skills and to provide additional assessment instruments to schools for their own use. Secondary schools are then required to set their own standards for performance in the basic skills and to assess their students in these skills, using the state developed tests or commercially or locally developed tests which have been approved by the state.

The design and implementation of the listening and speaking assessment was undertaken by the Education Commission of the States (ECS), a private, nonprofit organization located in Denver, Colorado, under contract with the Massachusetts Department of Education. The contractor was responsible for developing listening and speaking instruments for the statewide assessment. In addition, the contractor was responsible for developing three listening instruments and three speaking instruments, which were equivalent in content and difficulty to the instruments used in the statewide assessment. These alternate forms were for use by local school districts for their own assessments.

This paper describes the nature of the listening and speaking instruments used for the statewide assessment. The alternate forms of the instruments are held secure by the Massachusetts Department of Education. The paper also briefly summarizes the results of the statewide survey. The instruments and results reflect the specific conditions present in the state of Massachusetts. Nevertheless, many other states and school districts have current or projected programs for listening and speaking instruction and assessment and may find the Massachusetts project a useful model.

Assessment Design

The scope of the assessment was established by the listening and speaking objectives identified in the Basic Skills Improvement Policy and Regulations. These objectives focus on skills essential for everyday functioning in school, employment and community settings. They are minimal competencies that all students should master before leaving high school. Thus, the goal of the assessment is to measure the most important and basic listening and speaking skills, not the full range of skills within these areas.

For the listening assessment, groups of students listened to material on a tape recording and then answered multiple-choice questions about what they heard. The instrument is unique in that the passages students listened to represent typical spoken language such as news stories, public service announcements, commercials and conversations. Most existing listening tests use typical written material which is read aloud.

The speaking assessment used two measurement approaches. For the first approach, two teachers who had a student in class independently assessed the student using a set of speaking rating scales. The teachers based their ratings of a student on their observations of the student's typical speaking performance during normal classroom activity over a period of time. For the second approach, a trained rater assessed the student's speaking performance in a one-on-one situation. The rater gave the student several specific speaking tasks and then rated the student's performance on each task using the same speaking rating scales.

In addition to the assessment of listening and speaking performance, background questionnaires were administered to students, teachers and principals. They included questions about general school and student characteristics and questions about specific factors that might influence listening and speaking performance. This information was collected to provide baseline information prior to the implementation of the Basic Skills Improvement Policy and to help explain the performance of students on the listening and speaking assessment.

Sampling

The assessment used a stratified, multi-stage sampling procedure to select students for participation in the assessment. This sample was designed to be representative of public high school seniors from four kind-of-community (KOC) categories: Big Cities, Industrial Suburbs, Residential Suburbs and Other Communities. In addition, procedures were followed to ensure

adequate representation of minorities, areas of the state and sizes of schools.

The sampling plan was a self-weighting design which called for the random selection of 12 schools from within each KOC. Within each school 60 twelfth graders were randomly selected to participate in the listening assessment and 18 to participate in the speaking assessment. Students were exempted from testing who were non-English speaking or handicapped (physically, mentally or emotionally) in such a way that they could not respond to the assessment. The plan assumed that the sample size would be reduced by approximately one-third due to ineligibility and absenteeism. In the actual assessment one additional school was added to make a total of 49 participating schools.[1]

Test Administration

The listening and speaking assessment was conducted during March and April 1980. A total of 2,207 students were tested in the listening assessment and 691 students in the speaking assessment. No student was assessed in both areas.

The testing was conducted by a test administrator hired by ECS. The test administrator was assisted by a school coordinator identified by each participating school. The test administrator was primarily responsible for conducting the one-on-one speaking assessment. The school coordinator was primarily responsible for conducting the listening assessment. Testing for a school was completed within a single day.

Data Analysis

The data analysis reflected the requirements of a self-weighting sampling design. The estimate of performance of students within each KOC was the simple average of scores of the sampled students within each KOC. The estimate of performance of students statewide was computed by weighting the responses of students within each KOC according to their actual proportion in the state population. The estimate of sample variation, standard errors, was computed using the Taylor-series estimation procedure.

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[1]One school was added to complement a school that was selected but did not have the number of seniors required by the sampling plan.

The results were analyzed in several ways. Performance was reported for individual items and ratings. The results were summarized by types of items and ratings and by types of passages and tasks so that judgments could be made concerning the relative performance for various listening and speaking skills and situations. Performance was also summarized across all items and ratings in the instruments. All of the above results were provided for students statewide and for various reporting groups. In addition to the reports on student performance, the results of the background questionnaires were tabulated.

All of the results were aggregated across students and schools. No individual student or school was identified in any way. Thus, the results reflect the level of performance of students across the state. They do not indicate the level of performance of individual students or schools.

THE LISTENING ASSESSMENT

Objectives and Assessment Design

The listening assessment was designed to measure the 11 listening objectives identified by the Massachusetts Basic Skills Improvement Policy. Exhibit 1 lists the listening objectives and indicates how the listening passages and questions developed for the assessment are related to the objectives. Some of the objectives deal with general listening skills that apply to all listening situations -- for example, Objective A-1, Recognize Words and Phrases. Other objectives deal with specific listening situations -- for example, Objective C-1, Understand and Respond to Survival Words Used in Emergency Situations.

To assess the listening objectives, a test was developed that includes a variety of listening passages and asks a variety of listening questions. The text of the passages and items are provided in Appendix A. The passages reflect the objectives that deal with specific listening situations. The questions reflect the objectives that deal with general listening skills. The test measures the objectives globally; it does not measure each individual objective. Thus, the instrument is a general descriptive test of listening ability, not a diagnostic test.

EXHIBIT 1. Relationship of Passages and Questions to Listening Objectives

Objectives	Passages	Questions
A. Basic Listening Skills		
1. Recognize words and phrases used by the speaker		3
2. Indicate why the speaker can or cannot be understood		8
B. Understanding What You Hear		
1. Understand spoken words and ideas		2,6,13,15,17,18
2. Identify and understand main ideas		1,14,19
3. Associate important details with main ideas		4,7,10,20,21
4. Understand descriptions of events and experiences	News Story Public Service Announcement	
5. Understand speaker's purpose		5,11,12,16
C. Using What You Hear		
1. Understand and respond to survival words used in emergency situations	Conversation	
2. Summarize information and draw conclusions		9,22
3. Recognize when words and phrases are used to convince or persuade	Commercial	
4. Follow straightforward directions	Telephone Conversation Teacher's Announcement	

The Listening Test

In the first stage of instrument development, four general categories of listening situations were identified. These are derived from the common listening situations specified in Objectives B-4, C-1, C-3 and C-4. The situations include:

- Descriptions of events and experiences
- Emergency messages
- Persuasive messages
- Sequences of directions

Stimulus materials were obtained from radio and TV stations or developed by the contractor to reflect the specific situations. Six passages were selected for the final version of the listening test. Descriptions were represented by a news story and a public service announcement. Emergency messages were represented by a conversation which takes place during an emergency. Persuasive messages were represented by a commercial. Sequences were represented by a telephone conversation and a teacher's announcement. The number of passages chosen for each category reflects the relative importance of the situation for mastery of basic skills as judged by review committees established by the Department of Education.

All the listening passages represent natural spoken language and reflect listening experiences that are common to all students. They also span a variety of in-school and out-of-school listening situations, some of which are formal -- like the news story -- and some of which are informal -- like the conversation. The listening stimuli are relatively short, ranging from 30 seconds to 1-3/4 minutes. The vocabulary and grammar in the passages are relatively simple. These characteristics reflect the basic skills orientation of the assessment and help reduce the influence of memory and motivation on performance.

Multiple-choice questions were then written for the passages. The questions reflected the general listening skills identified in objectives A-1, A-2, B-1, B-3, B-5 and C-2. The skills include:

- Recognize words and phrases
- Identify problems
- Understand words and ideas
- Identify main ideas
- Associate details
- Understand purpose
- Draw conclusions

Twenty-two questions (three to four per passage) were selected for the final version of the listening test. The questions related to each skill are indicated in Exhibit 1. The number of questions for each skill reflects the relative importance of a skill for mastery of basic skills as judged by the review committees.

All of the items are stimulus dependent. They can only be answered by listening to the material; they cannot be answered by a student's previous knowledge or experience.

All passages and items were field tested prior to final selection and were judged by the review committees to be culturally fair and balanced with respect to sex, racial/ethnic, geographic and socioeconomic representation.

The listening test was designed to be virtually self-contained on a cassette tape. Students were provided with booklets that included instructions and the multiple-choice questions and with separate answer sheets. Students heard the instructions, then a passage and then questions about the passage. Questions and response options were read aloud to minimize the effect of a respondent's reading ability on listening performance. After each item was read, there was a pause; this allowed students plenty of time to answer the question. They did so by marking their responses on an answer sheet.

Results of the Listening Assessment

Students' performance on the listening test was very high, which is to be expected in a basic skills test. On the average, students correctly answered 88% of the items which is equivalent to about 19 out of 22 items.

Students' performance was high for all seven skills areas. Questions related to two skills -- Recognize Words and Phrases and Understand Words and Ideas -- appeared to be relatively harder for students than other questions. The average percentage correct for these two areas was 84%. Questions related to three skills -- Identify Problems, Identify Main Idea and Understand Purpose -- appeared to be very easy for students, with average percentages correct above 90% in all three areas. Students' performance on questions related to the remaining two skills -- Associate Details and Draw Conclusions -- fell in between the two extremes. The average percentage correct for these two areas was 88%. It should be noted, however, that there were very few items for each listening skill. In two cases there was only one item for a skill. This makes it inappropriate to place much emphasis on the relative difficulty of the different listening skills.

Performance was high for all listening situations except for Persuasive Messages which was much lower. The average percentages correct for Descriptions, Emergency Messages and Sequences were 88% or higher. The average percentage correct for Persuasive Messages was 73%, a dramatic difference. In a previous Massachusetts Basic Skills Assessment of reading, similar results were obtained. Students' performance was noticeably lower on questions about persuasive reading passages than on questions about other types of reading material. This result suggests that persuasive situations are particularly difficult for students. However, it should be noted that this situation was only represented by one passage and three questions. Also, one of the questions (question 7) was unusually difficult and required students to draw a very high-level inference about the material. Thus, the results are suggestive of a problem area but not definitive.

Reliability and Validity of the Listening Test

In addition to the analysis of student performance, several steps were implemented prior to and during the assessment to test the reliability and validity of the listening test.

The reliability of the test was determined by a test of the internal consistency of the items. The Hoyt estimate of reliability yielded a correlation coefficient of .76.

Prior to the assessment, the content validity of the listening test was determined by expert judgment. A panel of communication experts independently examined the listening passages and items and in a blind review matched them to the listening objectives. In general the panel agreed almost unanimously with respect to the categorization of passages and agreed most of the time with respect to the categorization of items. Based on the reviewers' comments, adjustments were made in the test so that it more nearly reflected the objectives.

The review committees established by the Department of Education felt that assessment procedures results confirmed the reliability and validity of the listening test.

THE SPEAKING ASSESSMENT

Objectives and Assessment Design

The speaking assessment was designed to measure the 14 speaking objectives identified by the Massachusetts Basic Skills Improvement Policy. Exhibit 2 lists the speaking objectives and indicates how the speaking rating scales and tasks developed for the assessment are related to the objectives. Similar to the listening objectives, some of the speaking objectives deal with general speaking skills that apply to all speaking situations -- for example, Objective A-1, Use Words and Phrases Appropriate to the Situation. Other objectives deal with specific speaking situations -- for example, Objective C-1, Use Survival Words to Cope with Emergency Situations.

A set of speaking rating scales were developed for the speaking assessment. These scales were used in two ways:

- For classroom observation by teachers
- For one-on-one assessment by trained raters

The following sections describe the speaking rating scales, the teacher observation approach, the one-on-one approach and how the approaches are combined into a two-staged assessment.

EXHIBIT 2. Relationship of Tasks and Ratings to Speaking Objectives

Objectives	Tasks	Ratings
A. Basic Oral Communication Skills		
1. Use words and phrases appropriate to the situation		Content
2. Speak loudly enough to be heard by a listener or group of listeners		Delivery
3. Speak at a rate the listener can understand		Delivery
4. Say words distinctly		Delivery
B. Planning, Developing, and Stating Spoken Messages		
1. Use words in an order that clearly expresses the thought		Organization
2. Organize main ideas for presentation		Organization
3. State main ideas clearly		Content
4. Support main ideas with important details		Content
5. Demonstrate knowledge of standard English usage		Language
C. Common Uses of Spoken Messages		
1. Use survival words to cope with emergency situations	Respond to an Emergency	
2. Speak so listener understands purpose		Content
3. Ask for and give straightforward information	Explain a Sequence	
4. Describe objects, events and experiences	Describe an Object, Event or Experience	
5. Question others' viewpoints	Persuade Someone to Do Something	

Speaking Rating Scales

A set of four scales was developed to measure the objectives that deal with general speaking skills. Each scale measures one dimension of speaking skills. The dimensions include:

- Delivery
- Organization
- Content
- Language

The delivery dimension focuses on Objectives A-2, A-3 and A-4 and is concerned with how well a student transmits messages. It measures how well a student uses appropriate volume, rate and articulation while speaking. The organization dimension focuses on Objeectives B-1 and B-2 and is concerned with how well a student structures messaages. It measures how well a student expresses the sequence or relationships of ideas. The content dimension focuses on Objectives A-1, B-3, B-4 and C-2 and is concerned with how well a student provides an adequate amount of relevant information to meet the requirements of various speaking tasks. In addition, it measures how well a student adapts the content of messages to specific listeners and situations. The language rating focuses on Objective B-5 and is concerned with how well a student uses appropriate grammar and vocabulary while speaking.

Within each speaking dimension, performance is rated using a 4-point scale:

1 = Inadequate
2 = Minimal
3 = Adequate
4 = Superior

The dimensions and the levels of the rating scales are explained in the the "Speaking Assessment Ratings Guide" which may be found in Appendix B.

The Teacher Observation Approach

The teacher observation approach is a general measure of a student's speaking performance. In this approach, two teachers who had the same student currently enrolled in class independently rated the student's general speaking performance in class using the speaking rating scales. Usually one of the teachers was an English teacher and the other from another subject area where students participate in a fair amount of classroom discussion and interaction, such as history, government or science.

Teachers were asked to read the "Speaking Assessment Ratings Guide" and then to complete the ratings. Teachers based their ratings of a student on their observation of the student's performance in normal classroom activities, such as asking questions, responding to questions, explaining how to do something, giving a report to the class or talking with other students in discussion groups. They considered the student's average performance since the beginning of the semester.

The One-on-One Approach

The one-on-one approach is a focused measure of a student's speaking performance. In this approach, a trained rater rated the student's performance using the same speaking rating scales used by teachers for the teacher observation approach. However, instead of basing ratings on classroom observations, the rater gave the student specific tasks and rated the student's performance on these tasks.

Each rater was provided with one day of training in the one-on-one approach. The rater assessed each student individually. The rater gave the student several speaking tasks and rated the student's performance on each task along the four dimensions. Thus, for each task, the rater gave the student a rating from 1 to 4 for delivery, organization, content and language. The rating was assigned immediately after the student's response.

The speaking tasks used in the one-on-one approach reflect the objectives that deal with specific speaking situations. The tasks include:

- A description
- An emergency
- A sequence
- A persuasion task

The description task focuses on Objective C-4 and is concerned with how well a student can describe an object, event or experience so that another person would know something about the topic. The emergency task focuses on Objective C-1 and is concerned with how well a student can provide the necessary information in an emergency so that another person could send help. The sequence task focuses on Objective C-3 and is concerned with how well a student can explain a sequence of steps so that another person could follow the sequence. The persuasion task focuses on Objective C-5 and is concerned with how well a student can present effective arguments so that another person would be persuaded by the student's point of view.

The focus of all of the speaking tasks was on the student's effectiveness in transmitting the message -- not on the specific content of the messages. Tasks were developed which were familiar to all students and did not require any special knowledge or experience. The tasks were field tested with 9th graders and 12th graders from inner city, suburban and rural schools to assure that they would be relevant for a wide variety of students of various ages. Based on field test results, four tasks, one of each type, were selected for the final version of the speaking test. These tasks were judged to be substantially free of sex, racial/ethnic, geographic and socioeconomic bias by the review committees. The text of the tasks is provided in Appendix C.

The Two-Staged Approach

The rationale for developing a two-staged approach for assessing speaking is based on the need for measures that are reliable, valid and free of bias. The teacher observation approach provides a general measure of student performance. It assesses all types of speaking tasks as they occur in a natural situation. However, sometimes a general measure such as this one allows for other factors, such as academic achievement or sociability, to enter into the ratings. The one-on-one approach provides a focused measure of student performance. It assesses only a few types of speaking tasks in a contrived setting. However, it focuses entirely on speaking variables and uses standardized procedures. The two approaches complement one another and taken together guard against the many problems of reliability, validity and bias that are inherent in speaking measures.

Another reason for the two-staged approach is the need for measures that are feasible for large-scale use by school districts in the future. The intention is to use the teacher observation approach as a screening measure and to use the one-on-one approach as a back-up measure in cases where a student's level of ability is in question. School districts would use the teacher observation measure to assess all students in a grade. They would use the one-on-one measure to assess students whose level of ability is in question. For example, the one-on-one measure might be used when two teachers do not agree in their observation ratings of a student.

Before final plans are made for implementing the speaking measures in school districts, it is necessary to demonstrate that the two approaches are reliable and valid. Initial tests of the reliability and validity of the measures were conducted during the statewide assessment. The review committees felt that initial results were encouraging. However, further study will be undertaken before final recommendations are made regarding how the

measures should be used by school districts.

Results of the Speaking Assessment

On the average, students performed adequately in all areas of the speaking assessment. Their average ratings for the teacher observation approach and the one-on-one approach were about the same, both falling just below 3 on a scale of 1 to 4.

The average rating of students for the teacher observation ratings overall was 2.95. The averages for each speaking dimension ranged from 2.91 for Delivery to 2.99 for Content. Thus, the level of performance did not vary much from dimension to dimension.

The average rating of students on the one-on-one ratings overall was 2.89, slightly lower than the average rating for the teacher observation ratings. The ratings summarized across speaking dimensions ranged from 2.85 for Content to 2.94 for Language. The ratings summarized across speaking tasks ranged from 2.84 for Description to 2.97 for Emergency. Thus, similar to the teacher observation results, the level of performance on the one-on-one ratings did not vary much from dimension to dimension or from task to task.

Most of the ratings (79%) assigned to students in the one-on-one assessment were 3's which reflect adequate performance. Very few ratings (about 1%) were 1's for inadequate performance and few ratings (about 6%) were 4's for superior performance. Of interest is the small but noticeable percentage of 2 ratings (about 17%) which reflect minimal performance. Another result which demonstrates a lack of skills among some students is the failure of 18% of the students to mention the nature and location of the emergency in the emergency task.

Reliability and Validity of the Speaking Approaches

In addition to the analysis of student performance, several steps were implemented prior to and during the assessment to test the reliability and validity of the speaking approaches.

The reliability of the teacher observation approach was determined by examining the consistency of the ratings of two teachers for the same students. Approximately 95% of the ratings were either identical or adjacent (within one point of one another). There were no systematic differences in the ratings of different types of teachers (English teachers compared to other teachers).

The reliability of the one-on-one approach was determined by examining the consistency of the ratings of the trained raters for the same student. In a test of inter-rater reliability conducted prior to the assessment, raters assigned identical ratings 85% of the time. Rater consistency was determined after the assessment by rescoring 10% of the student responses. Rescoring was conducted by project staff who were reliable raters. In this test, raters assigned identical ratings 75% of the time.

The validity of the speaking approaches was determined by expert judgment and empirical tests. Prior to the assessment, a panel of communication experts independently examined the speaking tasks and speaking dimension and in a blind review matched them to the speaking objectives. In general the panel agreed almost unanimously with respect to the categorization of tasks and most of the time with respect to the categorization of speaking dimensions. Based on the reviewers' comments, adjustments were made in the tasks and dimensions so that they more nearly reflected the objectives.

The degree to which the two assessment approaches were measuring the same thing, concurrent validity, was determined by comparing the teacher observation ratings and one-on-one ratings for the same student. Ratings were combined to form a total teacher observation score and an adjusted total one-on-one score, both scores ranging from 8 to 32. In 81% of the cases the scores were within 4 points of one another and in 98% of the cases scores were within 8 points of one another.

The review committees established by the Department of Education felt that the assessment procedures and results confirmed the reliability and validity of the two-staged speaking assessment approach.

SUMMARY

The Massachusetts Basic Skills Assessment of listening and speaking provides viable models for measuring listening and speaking skills of secondary level students and reveals interesting results regarding levels of competence of students in these areas. The instruments and results reflect the specific conditions present in the state of Massachusetts. Nevertheless, the Massachusetts experience should be useful to the increasing number of states and school districts which are moving into instruction and assessment of listening and speaking skills.

APPENDIX A

NEWS STORY

You are about to hear a recording of a news story. After the story you will be asked several questions about what you heard.

Do not take notes while you are listening to the recording.

Do not turn the page until told to do so. Now listen carefully.

The artistic process is a complex one -- take song writing for example. You picture the songwriter, sitting alone at the piano, composing some melodic work of art. But a Philadelphia firm has come up with a way of making that songwriter's job somewhat easier. Charles Trois of Tenel Industries has devised a computer system which he claims can help a songwriter pick a hit melody. To compute a song's hit potential, the melody is fed into the computer and within ten minutes the song is rated on a scale of one to ten. Trois explains his rating system as such: A song with a score of one to three will be a flop; a four means it's a possible hit; songs rated five and six could make the charts, and a seven might make the top ten. Melodies carrying ratings of eight and nine will be number one hits while a ten should become a classic. Trois claims that his computer has an eighty-two percent success rate in picking hits. However, there's only one problem with the machine -- it can only handle pop and soft rock songs. Hard rock just won't compute....

1. What is the main idea of this story?

   A. Some songs are very hard to write.

   B. Computers are now being used to pick hit songs.

   C. Computers can be programmed to write music.

   D. Most songs written will not be classics.

2. What can Trois' machine handle?

   A. Pop and soft rock

   B. Hard rock

   C. Classical music

   D. All time favorites

3. This story says that "a Philadelphia firm has come up with a way of making the songwriter's job somewhat easier." What does firm mean in the story?

   A. Computer

   B. Inventor

   C. Lawyer

   D. Company

4. How is a song rated?

   A. By asking well known songwriters

   B. By singing the song for an audience

   C. By making the computer play the song

   D. By feeding the melody into the computer

COMMERCIAL

You are about to hear a recording of a commercial. After the commercial you will be asked several questions about what you heard.

Now listen carefully.

Enjoy delicious fried chicken right at home this week-end...and save money...with a fresh whole fryer from Food King. Roast a whole fryer on the barbecue...split a fryer and broil the halves...cut up a fryer for fried chicken. Save on USDA Grade "A" whole fresh fryers, 10¢ off our regular low price per pound.

5. What is the main purpose of this announcement?

   A. To convince people that Food King sells only top quality chicken

   B. To give people information about food prices

   C. To tell people how they can cook chicken

   D. To persuade people to buy chicken at Food King

6. What did the announcement say about the price of chicken at Food King?

   A. Chicken is 10¢ off per pound.

   B. Chicken is 10% off.

   C. Chicken is 20¢ off per pound.

   D. Chicken is at its every day low price.

7. Why should people buy chicken now at Food King?

   A. Because chicken is delicious when fried

   B. Because Food King has fresh fryers

   C. Because chicken is on sale

   D. Because Food King fryers are cut up

TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

You are about to hear a recording of a telephone conversation. After the conversation you will be asked several questions about what you heard.

Now listen carefully.

Child: Hello?

Adult: Hello. I'd like to speak to Mrs. Kaplan.

Child: She's not here.

Adult: Oh, (pause) do you expect her back soon?

Child: No, she's out of town. She'll be back on Friday.

Adult: Ok, would you give her a message?

Child: Yeah, wait a minute. I've got to get something to write with. (Pause) Ok.

Adult: This is Mrs. Benton. I'm calling to remind your mother of the Neighborhood Action Group meeting this Saturday night. Tell her we'll need the box of pencils because we'll be voting. Also, she promised to give me a ride so I'll be expecting her to pick me up. Oh, yes, one more thing, we've got to be at the meeting at least 10 minutes early. Did you get all of that?

Child: Yeah, I got it. Do you want Mom to call you?

Adult: Yeah, I think that would be a good idea. I might think of something else before then. (This last sentence is spoken softly and mumbled.)

Child: What?

Adult: I said I might think of something else before then.

Child: Oh, Ok.

Adult: Thanks so much.

Child: Ok, bye.

Adult: Goodbye.

8. Why did Mrs. Benton have to repeat part of her message?

   A. Because there was a loud noise in the background

   B. Because she started to cough

   C. Because she spoke too softly and mumbled

   D. Because she talked too fast

9. What will Mrs. Kaplan probably do as soon as she returns home?

   A. Go to the meeting

   B. Go to her office for messages

   C. Type up the ballot for voting

   D. Call Mrs. Benton

10. Why should Mrs. Kaplan bring pencils to the meeting?

   A. To get addresses of new people

   B. To have for taking attendance

   C. To write down the message

   D. To have for voting

11. Why did Mrs. Benton call Mrs. Kaplan?

   A. To remind Mrs. Kaplan of the Neighborhood Action Group meeting

   B. To find out about Mrs. Kaplan's trip

   C. To give Mrs. Kaplan directions to her house

   D. To encourage Mrs. Kaplan to vote at the Neighborhood Action Group election

TEACHER'S ANNOUNCEMENT

You are about to hear a recording of a teacher's announcement. After the announcement you will be asked several questions about what you heard.

Now listen carefully.

Now, if I can have your attention for a few minutes, I'd like to explain a new assignment. Please settle down so everyone can hear.

After we finish our current unit, we'll have one free class period before break. What I'd like to do with this time is to have a party, but this won't be an ordinary party. It will be a special party because we're going to invite people from the past. And each one of you will be one of those historical people. During the party, you'll be asked many questions about your life and what you did that was important, so this will require a little bit of preparation. Tomorrow we'll spend some time in class drawing up a list of names of famous, historical people. This way we'll get a lot of different ideas. Next, we'll put all of the names in a box and each draw one name. Then, before the party, you'll have to learn about the person whose name you drew. (Pause) So, if there are no questions, I'll go on with today's topic.

12. What is the main purpose of the teacher's announcement?

A. To encourage students to read magazines and newspapers

B. To explain a new assignment to the class

C. To remind students about school break

D. To urge students to always come to class well prepared

13. What will the class study before break?

A. People from the past

B. Political parties

C. Social customs

D. Current events

14. What are the students supposed to do?

A. Find out about a famous person

B. Go to a costume party

C. Write about a famous person

D. Collect pictures of famous people

15. When will the students draw up a list of names?

A. Before the end of the day

B. Tomorrow

C. Next week

D. Before break

PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

You are about to hear a recording of a Public Service Announcement. After the announcement you will be asked several questions about what you heard.

Now listen carefully.

Your City Parks and Recreation Department has something for you every season. Register now for the final fall session of Outdoor Nature Programs. A variety of wildlife, ecology, and conservation classes and activities are offered through November for the whole family. Young Explorers meet in the morning or after school and teens may become wildlife volunteers. Nature hikes and cross country ski trips are available for all ages and ability levels. For more information, call us at 472-4523.

16. What is the main purpose of this announcement?

A. To urge people to donate money to the Outdoor Nature Program

B. To inform people about current problems of ecology

C. To persuade people to protect birds and other wildlife

D. To give people information about nature classes

17. Who are the classes for?

A. Residents only

B. Club members

C. Young Explorers only

D. The whole family

18. Who is sponsoring the nature programs?

A. The Young Explorers

B. A local conservation group

C. Wildlife volunteers

D. The Parks and Recreation Department

CONVERSATION

You are about to hear a recording of a conversation. After the conversation you will be asked several questions about what you heard.

Now listen carefully.

Janice: I always enjoy this bus ride up to Vermont. It's so good to get away from the city.

Man on Bus: Yes, everything seems so much cleaner out here. I don't know, though, sometimes these buses make me feel a little queasy, all the shaking back and forth. They're always so stuffy. I'm beginning to feel a little dizzy right now. I think...(pause).

Janice: Hey, hey! Are you all right? Somebody, help me! He's passed out. Stop the bus!

Passenger: What's going on? What's the matter with him?

Janice: I think he's fainted. He said something about feeling dizzy. Could you help me? What should we do?

Passenger: Sure. Let's lower his head between his knees. Get his hands out of the way. Yeah, that looks good. He'll be all right in a minute.

Janice: Good, 'cause I don't know if I can hold him like this for long. When he said he felt dizzy, he really meant it!

Passenger: Yeah, he looks really pale. I think we'll be getting off the freeway at the next exit. Do you think you can hold him by yourself for a minute while I go ask the driver?

Janice: Yes, I can hold him a little bit, but don't take too long.

Passenger: OK, I'll be right back. (Pause)

Man on Bus: Mmm...Hmmm... What happened?

Janice: Don't try to sit up yet. Keep your head down. Are you feeling better?

Man: Yeah, but I feel a little shaky. I guess I passed out.

Janice: Yeah, you did, but don't try to talk. Just be quiet, 'til you feel better.

Passenger: Oh, I see he's coming around. Good. The driver says we'll be stopping in a minute. He'll feel better then.

19. What happened to the man on the bus?

A. He stood up and bumped his head.

B. He stopped breathing.

C. He had a mild heart attack.

D. He fainted.

20. Why did the man on the bus feel queasy?

A. Because the air was polluted

B. Because he hadn't eaten all day

C. Because he was taking medication

D. Because the bus was shaking back and forth

21. What was the first thing the girl and the woman did to help the man?

A. They opened the window on the bus.

B. They lowered the man's head between his knees.

C. They shook the man by his shoulders.

D. They asked the man if he wanted a drink of water.

22. What probably happened after the woman talked to the driver?

A. The bus slowed down until the man felt better.

B. The man passed out again.

C. The woman called the police.

D. The bus driver stopped as soon as possible.

APPENDIX B

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ASSESSMENT OF BASIC SKILLS

SPEAKING ASSESSMENT RATINGS GUIDE

OVERVIEW

There are numerous kinds of speaking tasks that students must perform in everyday life, both in school and out of school. The Massachusetts Basic Skills Improvement Policy has focused on some of these tasks, including describing objects, events and experiences, explaining the steps in a sequence, providing information in an emergency and persuading someone.

In order to accomplish a speaking task, the speaker must formulate and transmit a message to a listener. This process involves deciding what needs to be said, organizing the message, adapting the message to the listener and situation, choosing language to convey the message and finally delivering the message. The effectiveness of the speaker may be rated in terms of how well the speaker meets the requirements of the task.

The Massachusetts test of basic skills in speaking separates speaking skills into four dimensions:

Delivery
Organization
Content
Language

Delivery is concerned with the transmission of the message, i.e., volume, rate and articulation. Organization is concerned with how the content of the message is sequenced and how the ideas are related to one another. Content is concerned with the amount and relevance of information in the message, and how the content is adapted to the listener and situation. Language is concerned with the grammar and words which are used to convey the message.

Each of the four dimensions is rated on a four point scale: 1 is the lowest rating and 4 is the highest rating. A general set of principles underlies the rating scale for all four components. Ratings of 1 reflect speaking skills which are inadequate in meeting the requirements of the task. Ratings of 2 reflect speaking skills which are minimal in meeting the requirements of the task. Ratings of 3 reflect speaking skills which are adequate in meeting the requirements of the task. Ratings of 4 are superior in meeting the requirements of the task.

Individuals who act as raters for the speaking assessment need to take the role of a naive, objective listener. The rater must be naive so that the rater can base his or her rating on exactly what the speaker says. The rater must be careful not to let his or her own knowledge and experience influence the rating. The rater must face each speaker as if it were a new experience. The rater must also be objective so that he or she does not let a particular set of norms of social acceptability influence the rating. The rater must evaluate the speaker in terms of how well the speaker meets the requirements of the speaking task, irrespective of the particular communication style the speaker uses.

DELIVERY

The delivery rating focuses on the transmission of the message. It is concerned with volume, rate and articulation. Articulation refers to pronunciation and enunciation. Some examples of poor articulation include mumbling, slurring words, stammering, stuttering and exhibiting disfluencies such as ahs, uhms or "you knows."

1 = The delivery is inadequate in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The volume is so low that you cannot understand most of the message.
The rate is so fast that you cannot understand most of the message.
The pronunciation and enunciation are so unclear that you cannot understand most of the message.

2 = The delivery is minimal in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The volume is too low or too loud.
The rate is too fast or too slow. Pauses are too long or at inappropriate spots.
The pronunciation and enunciation are unclear. The speaker exhibits many disfluencies such as ahs, uhms or "you knows."
You are distracted by problems in the delivery of the message.
You have difficulty understanding the words in the message. You have to work to understand the words.

3 = The delivery is adequate in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The volume is not too low or too loud.
The rate is not too fast or too slow. Pauses are not too long or at inappropriate spots.
The pronunciation and enunciation are clear. The speaker exhibits few disfluencies, such as ahs, uhms and "you knows."
You are not distracted by problems in the delivery of the message.
You do not have difficulty understanding the words in the message.

4 = The delivery is superior in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The speaker uses delivery to emphasize and enhance the meaning of the message. The speaker delivers the message in a lively, enthusiastic fashion.
The volume varies to add emphasis and interest.
Rate varies and pauses are used to add emphasis and interest.
Pronunciation and enunciation are very clear. The speaker exhibits very few disfluencies such as ahs, uhms or "you knows."

NOTE: In articulation you may be concerned with accent. However, articulation should be rated with respect to your ability to understand the message, not the social acceptability of the accent. One particular accent is not considered better than another. REMEMBER, in this component you are rating how the student speaks, not what the student says.

ORGANIZATION

The organization rating focuses on how the content of the message is structured. It is concerned with sequence and the relationships among the ideas in the message.

1 = The organization is inadequate in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The message is so disorganized that you cannot understand most of the message.

2 = The organization is minimal in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The organization of the message is mixed up; it jumps back and forth.
The organization of the message appears random or rambling.
You have difficulty understanding the sequence and relationships among the ideas in the message. You have to make some assumptions about the sequence and relationships of ideas.
You cannot put the ideas in the message into an outline.

3 = The organization is adequate in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The message is organized.
You do not have difficulty understanding the sequence and relationships among the ideas in the message. You do not have to make assumptions about the sequence and relationships of ideas.
You can put the ideas in the message into an outline.

4 = The organization is superior in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The message is overtly organized.
The speaker helps you understand the sequence and relationships of ideas by using organizational aids such as announcing the topic, previewing the organization, using transitions and summarizing.

NOTE: Make sure you are not unconsciously "filling in" organization for a speaker, because you happen to know something about the speaker's topic. If you have to make assumptions about the organization, this fact should be reflected in your rating. REMEMBER, in this component you are rating how the student organizes the message, not what the student says.

CONTENT

The content rating focuses on the specific things which are said. It is concerned with the amount of content related to the task, the relevance of the content to the task and the adaptation of the content to the listener and the situation.

1 = The content is inadequate in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The speaker says practically nothing.
The speaker focuses primarily on irrelevant content.
The speaker is highly egocentric. The speaker appears to ignore the listener and the situation.

2 = The content is minimal in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The speaker does not provide enough content to meet the requirements of the task.
The speaker includes some irrelevant content. The speaker wanders off the topic.
The speaker adapts poorly to the listener and the situation. The speaker uses words and concepts which are inappropriate for the knowledge and experiences of the listener (e.g., slang, jargon, technical language). The speaker uses arguments which are self-centered rather than other-centered.

3 = The content is adequate in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The speaker provides enough content to meet the requirements of the task.
The speaker focuses primarily on relevant content. The speaker sticks to the topic.
The speaker adapts the content in a general way to the listener and the situation. The speaker uses words and concepts which are appropriate for the knowledge and experience of a general audience. The speaker uses arguments which are adapted to a general audience.

4 = The content is superior in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The speaker provides a variety of types of content appropriate for the task, such as generalizations, details, examples and various forms of evidence.
The speaker adapts the content in a specific way to the listener and situation. The speaker takes into account the specific knowledge and experience of the listener, adds explanations as necessary and refers to the listener's experience. The speaker uses arguments which are adapted to the values and motivations of the specific listener.

NOTE: This rating is concerned with content in terms of quantity, relevance and adaptation. It is not concerned with content in terms of accuracy. Concerns with accuracy of content fall outside a speaking skills assessment. Also, make sure you are not unconsciously "filling in" content for a speaker because you happen to know something about the speaker's topic. If you add information, this fact should be reflected in your rating. REMEMBER, in this component you are rating the quantity, relevance and adaptation of what the student says, not the accuracy of what the student says.

LANGUAGE

The language rating deals with the language which is used to convey the message. It is concerned with grammar and choice of words.

1 = The language is inadequate in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The grammar and vocabulary are so poor that you cannot understand most of the message.

2 = The language is minimal in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The speaker makes many grammatical mistakes.
The speaker uses very simplistic, bland language. The speaker uses a "restricted code," a style of communication characterized by simple grammatical structure and concrete vocabulary.

3 = The language is adequate in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The speaker makes few grammatical mistakes.
The speaker uses language which is appropriate for the task, e.g., descriptive language when describing, clear and concise language when giving information and explaining, persuasive language when persuading. The speaker uses an "elaborated code," a style of communication characterized by complex grammatical structure and abstract vocabulary.

4 = The language is superior in meeting the requirements of the task.

e.g., The speaker makes very few grammatical mistakes.
The speaker uses language in highly effective ways to emphasize or enhance the meaning of the message. As appropriate to the task, the speaker uses a variety of language techniques such as vivid language, emotional language, humor, imagery, metaphor, simile.

NOTE: In language you may be concerned with students who come from backgrounds where a foreign language or a non-standard form of English is spoken. However, language should be rated with respect to your ability to understand the message, not the social acceptability of the communication style. If a speaker's use of incorrect or non-standard English grammar interferes with your ability to understand the message, this fact should be reflected in your rating. REMEMBER, in this component you are rating how the student conveys the message through language, not what the student says.

APPENDIX C

MASSACHUSETTS DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION ASSESSMENT OF BASIC SKILLS

ONE-ON-ONE SPEAKING TASKS

Description Task:

Think about your favorite class or extracurricular activity in your school. Describe to me everything you can about it so that I will know a lot about it. (How about something like a school subject, a club or a sports program.)

Emergency Task:

Imagine that you are home alone and you smell smoke. You call the fire department and I answer your call. Talk to me as if you were talking on the telephone. Tell me everything I would need to know to get help to you. (Talk directly to me; begin by saying hello.)

Sequence Task:

Think about something you know how to cook. Explain to me step by step how to make it. (How about something like popcorn, a sandwich or eggs.)

Persuasion Task:

Think about one change you would like to see made in your school, like a change in rules or procedures. Imagine I am the principal of your school. Try to convince me that the school should make this change. (How about something like a change in the rules about hall passes or the procedures for enrolling in courses.)